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**Phenomenology-based Ethnography  
for Management Studies and Organizational Analysis**

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# **Phenomenology-based Ethnography for Management Studies and Organizational Analysis**

## **Abstract**

This article introduces phenomenology-based ethnography as a novel ethnographic approach for research in management studies and organizational analysis and describes three methods that have been developed from this approach: life-world-analytical ethnography, focused ethnography and go-along ethnography. Phenomenology-based ethnography has emerged from developments in sociology that draw on ‘social phenomenology’ developed by Alfred Schütz. These developments involve the use of phenomenology-based ethnographic methods that shift the focus of research onto participants’ subjective experiences of the field further than has been required by other ethnographic approaches. This article uses a set of dimensions that allow a comparison of these phenomenology-based methods’ aims, techniques of data collection and analysis, and required effort. These three methods are then compared with current ethnographic methods used in organizational research and management studies. The article concludes with a discussion that explores and addresses the critique of how phenomenology-based ethnography conceives the relationship between the researcher and the research subject.

**Keywords:** Alfred Schütz, Management Research, Methodology, Organizational Ethnography, Phenomenology-based Ethnography

## **Introduction**

Organizational ethnography is continually subject to innovation in methodology. Such innovations are designed to support the investigation of the increasing complexity and fragmentation of the workplace (Smets, Burke, Jarzabkowski, & Spee, 2014); of workers' spatial practices (Raulet-Croset & Borzeix, 2014); and of people's subjective experiences of organizations (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2012). They largely use methods derived from traditional ethnography that require researchers to immerse themselves in the field under scrutiny (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). In traditional ethnography, immersion in the field can be achieved in different ways, as suggested by Adler and Adler (1987) in their discussion of "membership roles in field research".

Traditional ethnography in management studies and organizational research often investigates the functioning of organizations. A related body of research explores managers' and organizational members' subjective experiences of management practice and organizations. Yet, as suggested by institutional theorists like Suddaby (2010) a greater number of studies concerned with the actors' subjective experience could enrich research in our disciplines. A similar argument has been made already more than three decades by Sanders (1982) who suggested that phenomenological approaches offer innovative methods to uncover organizational members' subjective experience of organizations and institutions. Her introduction of phenomenology into management studies has recently been revived by Gill (2014) and others (cf. Anosike, Ehrich, & Ahmed, 2012; Fitzgerald, & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Murtagh, Lopes, & Lyons 2011). This article adds to the growing interest in phenomenology in management studies and organizational research by focusing on a particular kind of phenomenological approach, namely phenomenology-based ethnography, which puts particular emphasis on the practical and in situ experience of the everyday. Three phenomenology-based methods are introduced: life-world analytical ethnography, focused

ethnography and go-along ethnography, which can facilitate the uncovering of managers' and workers' experiences of their role and participation in organizations, thus advancing research.

This introduction will be followed by four parts: *first*, developments in organizational ethnography and related practice-based research are discussed, so as to expand the suggestion of phenomenology-based ethnography as being innovative in management studies and organizational research. Second, the article introduces phenomenology-based ethnographic methods and describes them using a set of dimensions that allow researchers in management research and organization studies to make decisions about the usefulness of these methods for their research. Third, this paper demonstrates how the three methods differ from other ethnographic methods that are currently used in management studies and organizational research. And lastly, the article concludes with a brief discussion exploring the relationship between ethnographer and research subjects in phenomenology-based ethnography, which addresses some of the critiques against research methods that use phenomenology.

### **Organizational Ethnography and Practice-based Research**

For a long time, ethnography was simply a method used by anthropologists and ethnologists studying far away 'strange' worlds. Over the past one hundred years, a burgeoning body of studies about ethnographers' own societies has emerged. Sociologists have drawn on this body of research and adapted ethnography as a method to explore people's lives in urban environments of early industrial society (Park & Burgess, 1967). This strand of sociological research was particularly strong at the University of Chicago, where the development of the social sciences coincided with the rise of the social political activism of scholars like George Herbert Mead, John Dewey and Jane Addams (Cook, 1993; Schneiderhan, 2011). In light of this body of research, there also has been noteworthy interest in the organization of work,

initially developed by Everett Hughes (1958) and continued in a sub-area of sociology that Herbert Blumer (1969) named “Symbolic Interactionism”.

Symbolic interactionist ethnographies originate in Blumer’s (1969) interpretation of Mead’s work. Symbolic interactionists use existing knowledge and theories about the social world as “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer, 1969: 150) when interpreting data, gathered primarily through participant observation and interviews, to build theory (Prus, 1995). In light of these methodological developments, ethnographies concerned with the organization of work were conducted by Hughes and his students (Becker, Greer, Hughes and Strauss, 1961; Hughes, 1958). These ethnographies explore for example how individuals are progressively shaped into organizational members through “organizational socialization” (van Maanen and Schein, 1979: 960), and how, through this process, “occupational communities” (van Maanen and Barley, 1984: 287) with their own “work cultures” emerge (van Maanen, 2010: 112). More recent ethnographies considered members’ relationships to their organizations by examining ‘organizational identity’ and ‘organizational stigma’. Stenger and Roulet (2017), for instance, explore how homosexual workers are perceived by their colleagues and managers within audit firms and what techniques they use to conceal their sexual orientation.

Interactionist ethnographies start from the assumption that organizational fields have a specific organization that the researcher can reconstruct through ethnographic methods. Although interactionists recognize the phenomenological critique of traditional ethnography (van Maanen, 2011) they adopt the position of social-scientific observers, whose aim is to elaborate the specific organization of particular fields, such as hospitals or the art world (Becker, 1982; Strauss, Schatzman, Ehrlich, Bucher and Sabshin, 1962) or, more recently, chefs and meteorologists (Fine, 2008, 2010). The same argument can be made with regard to structuralist, poststructuralist, critical and feminist ethnographies, which are also primarily

concerned with the specific organization of the field under study, and to a lesser extent with the practices performed in the field.

This relative lack of concern with practice has motivated the burgeoning field of practice theory and practice-based ethnographies. Practice-based research explores the emergence of practices within a larger activity system (cf. Jarzabkowski, 2010; Nicolini, 2012). Researchers use participant observation and interviews to investigate not simply people's actions, but how systems are embedded within larger networks of relationships, without, however, arguing that practices can be explained by a "logic" or "praxis" that organises people's actions in the background (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2016; Schatzki, 1997). In this sense, practice-based approaches are critical of sociological theories of practice like Bourdieu's (1992) "logic of practice" and Giddens' (1986) structuration theory, which presume a latent structure or structural mechanism like power defines practice. Rather, they are concerned with unpacking the historical and material circumstances of practice (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina and Savigny, 2000).

Over the past twenty years a considerable body of practice-based research has been produced in management and organization studies (Nicolini, 2009; Nicolini and Monteiro, 2016). In particular, within the field of management strategy, attention has been drawn to the practice involved in 'strategizing' (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007) and to extensive debates about 'strategy-as-practice' (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2006, 2007). These debates have encouraged studies that focus on how groups of people deal with practice breakdowns. De Rond and Lok (2013), for example, examine how performative breakdowns in institutional practice are restored by virtue of collective action. For this purpose they studied the practices through which a boat club crew is selected for a race and show how the club deals with the selection of rowers who do not adhere to the strict rules and regulations of the club. In a related study, King and de Rond (2011) elaborate on the ways in which the collective

performance of a rowing crew is facilitated by and achieved through a common rhythm of actions. Here, they demonstrate the close relationship between the selection of crew members and the production of a rhythm of action that leads the team to victory.

These and other practice-based studies involve the ethnographers integrating/ working/ interacting closely with the research subjects, without them becoming directly involved in the action. They immerse themselves in a field, such as a boat club or a military team in Afghanistan (de Rond and Lok, 2016), but, by virtue of their note taking and photographing, remain noticeably differentiated from the field under study. Their approach is similar to Fine's way of conducting his series of ethnographies in which he struck "a fortunate balance between involvement and detachment" (Sassatelli, 2010: 80). Fine joined a group, such as mushroom collectors (1998), or a team, like restaurant kitchen staff (2008), in order to understand the culture that 'glues' individuals together, but then distanced himself from the group or team for the purpose of analysing the data and writing about the organization. For these kinds of ethnographers, reflexivity "identifies research work as something to conduct by applying a certain distance, preferably one's own everyday life separate from research" (Sassatelli, 2010: 80). In recent years, ethnographers have increasingly undertaken studies in which they became participating members of their fields (Desmond, 2007; A. Goffman, 2014; Harrington, 2016). Such ethnographers use their status as members of the field to enhance their insights of their participants' social world, be it housing estates, urban neighbourhoods or the world of wealth managers. The phenomenology-based approaches discussed in the following section can add to the existing body of ethnographic, organizational studies, by putting the subjective, lived experience of managers and organizational members at the heart of the research. The ethnographers immerse themselves as much as possible in the field under study and in the analysis suspend all preconceptions and presuppositions to ensure they are able to capture the perspectives of the research subjects. Studies using phenomenology-based approaches,



therefore, can help to reveal how managers and organizational members experience and make sense of the organization. Thus, they can contribute to discussions about, for example, organizational identity; they can show how organizational members experience their relationship to an organization and how that experience of the organization relates to the image they have of themselves. As we will see in the examination of the three methods below, phenomenology-based approaches also offer techniques that can help reveal the organization of particular work activities and how they are embedded within the research subjects' experience of an organization. Moreover, the approaches can help uncover how managers and organizational members orient to organizational space and how that space is made sense of in relationship to the research subjects' work practice and experience.

### **Typology of Phenomenology-based Ethnographic Methods**

The ethnographic methods discussed in this section draw on phenomenology and, in particular, on social phenomenology, as developed by Alfred Schütz (1899 – 1959). Schütz was a student of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology that involved a profound critique of science as detached from the life-world and an analysis of the life-world (Husserl, 1970/1936, 2014/1936). Schütz (1967) admired Husserl's work, but argued that it neglected the fact that individuals are born into and live within social relationships. He therefore turned to Max Weber's (1949) concepts of 'social action' and 'Verstehen', to explore how sociologists investigated people's experience of the social world. Yet, Weber's (1949) theory of social action and sociology of 'Verstehen' did not satisfy Schütz (1967) because, in his view, Weber had failed to detail the concept of 'Verstehen' or to provide a methodology for uncovering the actor's subjective interpretation of the social world. Schütz (1967) therefore proposed to further develop the social sciences by using Husserl's phenomenology to analyse critically Max Weber's methodology. Based on his analyses he produced a concept of theory of social phenomenology as a basis for the

development of an actor-focused sociology, grounded in phenomenological principles (Eberle, 2010, 2012).

Schütz's proposal for a social science based on phenomenology implied a shift from the perspective of the scientist to that of the actor and their experience of the life-world. He explained that such a shift in perspective does not necessitate the abandoning of the scientific ideal of producing consistent and adequate scientific descriptions. However, it does require social scientists to produce descriptions that "are consistent with the constructs of common-sense experience of the social world" (Dean, 2017: 153).

Schütz regards the purpose of the social sciences as the uncovering of the social structure of knowledge and as producing adequate descriptions of the structures of the life-world that are logically consistent and capture the social world as experienced by actors (Schütz, 1967, 1970). Unfortunately, Schütz was unable to finish his project and only managed to reveal the cognitive foundations of the life-world and touch on its structures. Since Schütz's death, his student, Thomas Luckmann, as well as the subsequent generation of sociologists, have elaborated on his sociological approach. This is reflected, for example, in the publication of "The Structures of the Life-World" (Schütz and Luckmann, 1985), which Luckmann completed after Schütz's death.

As a result of Luckmann's teachings at the University of Konstanz and the dissemination of Schütz's work, social phenomenology has encouraged the development of novel interpretive approaches. The following section explores three ethnographic methods, which, with reference to Honer and Hitzler (2015), can be subsumed under the term 'phenomenology-based ethnographies'. They differ from the ethnographic methods discussed above in that they focus on participants' experience, knowledge and competencies. These three methods offer an innovative approach to studying social action and provide new opportunities for organizational analysis and management studies.

Table 1 provides an overview of the typology of these three phenomenology-based ethnographic methods: life-world analytical ethnography, focused ethnography, go-along ethnography.

**Table 1. Typology of New Phenomenology-based Ethnographic Methods**

<i>Common Basis</i>	<b>Phenomenology</b> Edmund Husserl		
<i>Derivations from Phenomenology</i>	<b>Social Phenomenology</b> Alfred Schütz Thomas Luckmann		
<i>Types of Method</i>	<b>Life-world Analytical Ethnography</b> Honer and Hitzler (2015)	<b>Focused Ethnography</b> Knoblauch (2005)	<b>Go-along Ethnography</b> Kusenbach (2003)
<i>Intellectual Origin</i>	Husserl, Schütz B. Luckmann	Schütz, Luckmann	Schütz and Luckmann, Garfinkel, Casey
<i>Disciplinary Origin</i>	Phenomenology	Sociology, Phenomenology	Sociology, Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology
<i>Aims</i>	<p>“Aims to investigate the subjective perspective - the life-worlds - of other people.” Honer and Hitzler (2015: 544).</p> <p>“A formal description of invariable basic structure of the constitution of meaning <i>in the subjective consciousness of actors</i>” Hitzler and Eberle (2004: 67).</p> <p>“The analysis aims to uncover the epistemological explanation of the life-world’s foundations by homing in on the experience of the subject.” vom Lehn and Hitzler (2015: 540) .</p>	<p>“To acquire the background knowledge necessary to perform the activities in question” Knoblauch (2005: 24).</p> <p>“Rigorously reconstructing the exact sequential organization of a more or less complex stretch of interaction” Knoblauch and Schnettler (2012: 335).</p> <p>“It only aims at certain elements of (partly embodied) knowledge relevant to the activity on which the study focuses.” Knoblauch (2005; 24).</p>	<p>“How individuals comprehend and engage their physical and social environments in everyday life” Kusenbach (2003: 456).</p> <p>“Actively explore their subjects’ stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment” Kusenbach (2003: 463).</p> <p>“To understand and theorize aspects of human experience and social action” Kusenbach (2012: 265) .</p>

<i>Method of Data Collection and Analysis</i>	<p>“Bracketing”</p> <p>Multiple forms of data, including observant participation, interviews, and documents.</p>	<p>Reflexive orientation to prior knowledge of setting.</p> <p>Audio-/video recording, Qualitative interviews.</p> <p>Activity Observation, Gathering of written material, photographs and other information.</p>	<p>‘Go-alongs’: ‘Walk-alongs’ (by foot) or ‘ride-alongs’ (on wheels).</p> <p>Participant observation and interview.</p>
<i>Engagement</i>	<p>“existential engagement”</p> <p>Long-term involvement in the field.</p> <p>Acquiring “Membership Status”</p>	<p>A few weeks in the field.</p> <p>Audio-/video-recording that focus on particular activities.</p> <p>Participant observation and interviews, documents, photographs.</p>	<p>Accompanying participants while “observing and querying them about their thoughts and feelings at the same time” Kusenbach (2008: 229)</p>
<i>Applications</i>	<p>Pfadenhauer (2009b)</p> <p>Pfadenhauer and Grenz (2015)</p>	<p>Knoblauch (2012)</p> <p>Cruz &amp; Higgingbottom (2013)</p> <p>Pink and Morgan (2013)</p> <p>vom Lehn (2014)</p>	<p>Kusenbach (2003, 2008)</p> <p>Carpiano (2009), Bergeron et al. (2014), Parzer et al. (2016)</p>

## ***Life-world Analytical Ethnography***

### *Intellectual Origin*

Life-world analytical ethnography is concerned with revealing the structure of action and experience in small life-worlds. Scholars using life-world analytical ethnography as a method draw on Benita Luckmann's (1970) notion of "small social life-worlds", based on Schütz's (1945) discussion of "multiple realities". She argues that "[T]he life-world of modern man is not of one piece. It does not unfold within one but within a variety of small "worlds" which often are unconnected with one another ... The multi-world existence of modern man requires frequent 'gear-shifting'" (1970: 587). For example, managers might run a meeting with their employees, then go and play golf with clients before picking up their children from school, and eventually conduct a video-call with colleagues working in other parts of the world.

### *Aims*

The aim of life-world analytical ethnography is to produce "a formal description of invariable basic structure of the constitution of meaning *in the subjective consciousness of actors*" (Hitzler and Eberle, 2004: 67; emphasis in original) who are involved in small life-worlds. When participating within small life-worlds, actors apply particular experiential and pragmatic orientations. These orientations imply a reliance on stocks of knowledge and practices that underpin particular small life-worlds, which have been uncovered by ethnographers using research methods that provide access to the actor's experiential and pragmatic orientations to the small life-world.

### *Methods of Data Collection and Analysis*

Life-world analytical ethnography aligns with Schütz's original pursuit of the development of a sociology grounded in phenomenology. It requires researchers to enter the field under

scrutiny with an open mind, ‘bracketing’, i.e. suspending sociological presuppositions and other preconceptions (Pfadenhauer and Grenz, 2015). It is concerned with the actor’s subjective experience, without being introspective. Instead it uses empirical research to reveal “the structures of the life-world” (Schütz and Luckmann, 1985).

The principal method of data collection in life-world analytical ethnography is *observant participation* (Honer and Hitzler, 2015). Observant participation requires researchers to adapt the perspective of participants by virtue of a practical, embodied engagement with social and material aspects of that life-world. Honer and Hitzler (2015) describe the perspective that researchers must adapt as “existential engagement”. The ethnographers become participants in the small life-world where they observe actions and events as members who can understand, first-hand, the knowledge and practices that underpin the small life-world.

Observant participation differs in four ways from participant observation: first, it produces observational and experiential data; second, participation is given more importance than observation (cf. Pfadenhauer and Grenz, 2015); third, the researchers themselves aim to achieve the subjective experience of members; and fourth, phenomenological methods of analysis are used to interpret the subjective experiential data (Maso, 2001; Pfadenhauer, 2005).

Being a participant in the field can make it difficult for the researcher to distance themselves from the observed events and participants. This tension between the distant scientific observer and the existentially engaged participant can overwhelm the researcher. Honer and Hitzler (2015) therefore recommend conducting fieldwork in pairs, to ensure the observational part of the research is not ignored.

Research using this method always begins with the researchers becoming existentially engaged in the field to gather high quality data, including “how and what one really *experiences*” in a particular social world (Pfadenhauer, 2005: 20; emphasis in original). For that purpose, they become full members of the field and are recognised by organizational members

as colleagues. Only when they have achieved full membership can they competently interview organizational members about their actions and experiences. At this point, the researchers have acquired members' skills, knowledge and competencies that allow them to be "at eye-level" (Pfadenhauer, 2009a) with the interviewee.

One of the difficulties for researchers is their withdrawal from the field in order to interpret their data. Again, Hitzler and Honer (2015) suggest working in pairs, if possible, when analysing the data, in order to be able to critically assess each other's interpretations and point out when interpretations seem to have been affected by preconceptions, sociological theories or knowledge the researchers have from elsewhere (cf. Hitzler and Eberle, 2004; Pfadenhauer and Grenz, 2015). The interpretation of the data uses hermeneutic techniques developed for the analysis of social scientific data. These techniques involve the identification of key themes and the progressive construction of typical characteristics of knowledge and practices the subjects under study display through their action and communication (Soeffner, 2004).

### *Applications*

Honer (1993) demonstrated the opportunities offered by life-world analytical ethnography through a detailed analysis of the life-world of handymen. She examined the different ways in which handymen develop and show their knowledge and competencies in their workshops at home. In her analysis, Honer (1993) identifies three types of handymen and elaborates the particular knowledge structure of each type as it becomes apparent from the interpretation of the data. Drawing on Honer's research, Pfadenhauer (2009b) investigated the work of DJs and their orientation to their audience. She reveals the knowledge and techniques that Club DJs use when they mix artistic action with a service orientation to their audiences, in order to create an event that is experienced as a "good party".



With regard to management studies and organizational analysis, life-world analytical ethnography is particularly well suited for revealing people's experiential and embodied experience of organizations. Thus, it can contribute to ongoing debates about organizational identification. For example, by joining an organization as a full-time member for considerable time, researchers become existentially engaged in the field, allowing them to identify with the organization. In addition to the findings about "organizational socialization", "occupational communities" and "work cultures" (van Maanen, 2010; van Maanen and Barley, 1984), generated by virtue of other ethnographic methods, life-world analytical methods provide researchers with the opportunity of determining different types of organizational identification, based on their examination of participants' experiences of an organization. Moreover, the life-world analytical approach can contribute to current debates about the relationship between wider social norms and organizational culture, and how participants deal with conflicts arising from this relationship. For example, when Stenger and Roulet (2017) investigated the techniques that organizational members used to avoid disadvantages in their career development due to their sexual orientation, life-world analytical methods could have enabled them to address questions such as, what different types of experience with regards to organizational culture can be differentiated in an organization and how are organizational members' experiences of an organization influenced by their experiences of social relationships and norms in wider society.

### ***Focused Ethnography***

#### *Intellectual Origin*

Focused ethnography derives from the social phenomenology developed by Schütz and Luckmann, as well as related developments in the new sociology of knowledge (Knoblauch, 2010). Researchers using this method are committed to Schütz's social phenomenology and concentrate on participants' pragmatic orientation to the social world, in order to reveal the knowledge and competencies they bring to bear in the performance of particular activities. For the purpose of the analysis of the audio- and video-recorded data that is central to this method, focused ethnographers use methods and techniques derived from ethnomethodology and conversation analysis that are both closely related to Schütz's work. Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis orient the ethnographer to the analysis of the "*situational structures* or patterns in the creation of social reality" (Knoblauch, Tuma and Schnettler, 2015: 63; emphasis in the original) and provide them with techniques to unpack the organization of activities.

### *Aims*

Focused ethnography is a particular kind of sociological ethnographic method designed to uncover the specialised knowledge of members of an organization or of a particular field. To uncover this specialised knowledge, focused ethnographers draw on Schütz's social phenomenology as well as on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, which provide them with both an analytic perspective and with methodological techniques for data analysis. The aim of focused ethnography is "to acquire the background knowledge necessary to perform the activities in question. Thus it still addresses the emic perspective of the natives' point of view, yet in a very specific sense: specified with respect to certain situations, activities and actions" (Knoblauch, 2005: §24).

### *Methods of Data Collection and Analysis*

Focused ethnography does not require the researcher to spend a long-time in the field to understand a ‘strange’ culture as would be required by traditional ethnological ethnography. The focused ethnographer, therefore, does not need to “live among those who are the data” (Rosen, 1991: 5) to acquire everyday knowledge of the participants’ culture, because they already share this knowledge and the language with them. Instead, they familiarise themselves with the specifics of the field through a relatively short period of observations, interviews and the gathering of documents. For the purpose of their research into the specialised knowledge that participants use in the field, the focused ethnographer collects large amounts of data through audio- and video-recording, which compensate for the short time spent in the field (Knoblauch, 2005; Knoblauch, Tuma and Schnettler, 2015; Pink and Morgan, 2013). While gathering data the researcher is closely involved with the participants in the field and, if possible, becomes involved in the participants’ activities. This can make it difficult for the researcher to maintain scientific distance to the observed and recorded events. Focused ethnographers, therefore, often work in teams, to ensure their closeness to the research subjects does not overwhelm the required distance from the field in their analysis.

The recorded data are examined using sequential analysis drawn from ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Have, 1998). Detailed transcripts of the talk and bodily actions are produced to help the researcher uncover the social organization of actions. The interviews, documents and photographs are analysed using social hermeneutics (Soeffner, 2004). This method is designed to construct “an objectivized type of social action” (Soeffner, 2004: 99) from case-specific data. It involves the examination of data and the comparison of concrete cases to identify commonalities and differences of cases, allowing the researcher to highlight case-specific particularities in light of structural generality.

‘Data workshops’ play an important part in the analysis of the data. In such meetings, the researchers discuss the recorded data with colleagues, who comment on the actions and on

proposed interpretations. Moreover, researchers often invite participants from the field to data sessions and ask them for information on technical and specialised knowledge required to understand the action, and also encourage them to contribute to the interpretation of their actions (Knoblauch, Tuma and Schnettler, 2015).

### *Applications*

In organizational research and cognate disciplines there is a growing interest in organizational practice. This emerging interest has led to a growing body of studies that use audio/video-recordings as their principal data to explore, for example, how emotion features in strategic work (Liu and Maitlis, 2014) and how strategic work involves material, bodily and spatial actions (cf. Jarzabkowski, Burke and Spee, 2015; LeBaron, Jarzabkowski, Pratt and Fetzer, 2017). Focused ethnography differs from and thus is able to contribute to this body of research by concentrating on the organization of particular work practices identified through ethnographic fieldwork. Knoblauch (1998), for example, used focused ethnography to investigate the collaborative work around a computer system. His analysis reveals how the participants neatly arrange their bodies and coordinate their vocal and bodily actions around the system to facilitate access to its screen. In a different study, Knoblauch (2011) focused on the practical performance of PowerPoint presentations. He unpacks the activities that constitute such presentations and elaborates on the techniques presenters use to perform knowledge; for example, he examines how presenters produce and locate knowledge by virtue of the organization of their gestures and talk. Based on this analysis, Knoblauch then demonstrates how the performance of knowledge via PowerPoint presentations is embedded within the context of the ‘knowledge society’. Other focused ethnographies have been used to explore the organization of activities in nursing (Cruz and Higginbottom, 2013); for the study of the hand

cleaning in healthcare settings (Pink, Morgan and Dainty, 2014) and for the investigation of the use of price statements on street-markets (vom Lehn, 2014).

Focused ethnography uses video-recordings as the key type of data, which allows researchers to examine the organization of practice in detail, in order to reveal the knowledge and competencies that participants use to make an organisation work. So, rather than concentrating on the functioning of an organization, focused ethnography is principally concerned with particular practices. Thus, it adds to practice-based scholarship (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina and von Savigny, 2000) by uncovering the knowledge and competencies that are deployed to accomplish organizational tasks in interaction between multiple participants. For example, with regard to the aforementioned research on cooperation amongst members of rowing crews (cf. King and de Rond, 2011; Lok and de Rond, 2013), focused ethnography could reveal the practical competencies that crew members use to establish and maintain a rhythm in their rowing.

### ***Go-along Ethnography***

#### *Intellectual Origin*

Go-along ethnography has emerged as a research method in the context of a growing sociological interest in mobilities (Urry, 2007) and in the development of mobile research methods (Büscher, Urry and Witchger, 2011; Kusenbach, 2012). Kusenbach's (2003) development of go-along ethnography has been informed by her studies with Luckmann in Germany, as well as her engagement with phenomenology, ethnography and ethnomethodology while studying at UCLA. With her ethnographic approach, Kusenbach has produced a powerful proposition for go-along ethnography as an innovative method that combines the phenomenological potential of intensive interviews with field observations. The focus of go-along ethnography is to "actively explore their subjects' stream of experiences and

practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment” (Kusenbach, 2003: 463).

### *Aims*

Kusenbach (2012: 256) suggests that the principal aim of mobile methods, including go-along ethnography, is “to understand and theorize aspects of human experience and social action, thus issues that always originate with socialized individuals, or persons”. She developed go-along ethnography as a method that can help overcome limitations of sit-down interviews and field observation. Whilst the former are conducted when interviewees are not engaged in ‘natural activities’, with the latter it is difficult to gain access to people’s experience of everyday life, because this is rarely a topic of their talk. Kusenbach (2003, 2008) therefore proposes go-along ethnography as a method that combines field observations, sit-down interviews, and “go-alongs” with interviewees. She argues that this method can offer a phenomenological understanding of “how individuals comprehend and engage their physical and social environments in everyday life” (Kusenbach, 2003: 456).

### *Methods of Data Collection and Analysis*

Go-along ethnography implies that both researcher and research subject move together, either on foot or by other means. The ethnographer does not replace field observation or interviews, rather combines both methods and augments them with “go-alongs”. Thus, researchers walk with the research subject through their neighbourhood, organization or workplace while “observing and querying them about their thoughts and feelings at the same time” (Kusenbach, 2008: 229). In her own research of the meanings and uses of place in two urban neighbourhoods, Kusenbach (2003, 2008) undertook intensive field observations, conducted

63 open-ended interviews in both neighbourhoods lasting between 45 minutes and three hours, and participated in a total of 50 go-alongs with many of her previous interviewees.

Kusenbach (2012) differentiates two kinds of go-alongs: ‘trails’ and ‘tours’. For the purpose of trails, the ethnographer shadows research subjects as they naturally move around. Trails might concern daily trips people undertake when going about their business, including the journey to and from work and mobile activities at work, such as client visits, flying to conferences and trade shows, etc. In tours, the ethnographer encourages the research subject to walk around, lead the researcher to important locations and “talk about past and current associations with the physical surroundings” (Kusenbach 2012: 258). Tours are not natural outings but they can be valuable ethnographic events as long as research subjects, and not researchers, determine the exact route and pacing of the go-along.

Go-alongs are undertaken in interaction between mobile researchers and subjects. By walking together and talking with subjects, the researcher is able to create a social relationship that helps to elicit talk about subjects’ personal biographies and their connection to the space they move through. Thus, aspects of local culture and local structure may be vocalised in response to places and other people that the research subjects and ethnographer come across on their go-along.

With regard to the data analysis, Kusenbach (2012: 257) refers to Tom Hall’s (2009) suggestion that the ethnographer, research subject and the outside world engage in a “three way conversation”; the go-along ethnographers explore their research subjects’ experience of place and the meaning that objects and features of the environment have for them. Therefore, go-along ethnography goes beyond interviews between a researcher and a subject, as it continuously includes the subject’s orientation to the outside world they and the researcher both move through.

### *Applications*

Go-along ethnography has primarily been used in sociological studies of urban environments and communities. For example, through her studies of two North-American urban communities, Kusenbach (2003) learned how people use community space, while also understanding the meaning of locations and place in their neighbourhood. Drawing on this research in neighbourhoods, go-along ethnography has been used, for example, to investigate the relationship between place and health (Bergeron, Paquette and Poullaouec-Gonidec, 2014; Carpiano, 2009) and to examine the spatial practices, experiences and interpretations of immigrant entrepreneurs and customers (Parzer, Rieder and Wimmer, 2016).

Go-along ethnography can make a valuable contribution to current debates in management studies and organizational research. For example, it can add to our understanding of how the increasing mobility of organizational members impacts their experience of and relationship to organizational space. Some organizational researchers (Smets et al., 2014) suggest using team-based ethnography to capture participants' actions and experiences of fragmented organizations and organizational processes. Go-along ethnography can add to this research by, for example, having researchers accompany 'mobile workers' or managers of large companies whose work schedules regularly include travels. Such research will help to uncover how participants experience their organization while working in remote locations. Go-along ethnography can also address the relationship between organizational space and organizational identity, by investigating questions such as how does participants' experience of organizational space relate to their identification with their organization and how do participants differentiate different types of organizational space with different aspects of their identity.

### **Phenomenology-based Ethnography and Other Ethnographic Methods**



Phenomenology-based ethnography provides novel methods for exploring issues of concern to those involved in management studies and organizational research. Whilst these methods are grounded in phenomenology, some scholars in our disciplines use related ethnographic methods that also address the relationship between ethnographer and research subjects. These methods share similarities in how they engage the question about this relationship, but they differ substantially in their aims from the methods that are at the heart of this article. The following four methods are worthwhile mentioning briefly: (1) immersion ethnography; (2) ethnomethodologically-informed ethnography; (3) workplace studies; and (4) mobile ethnography.

(1) *Immersion ethnography* (Harrington, 2015) builds on traditional anthropological ethnography and recent developments in sociological ethnography, which use ‘observant participation’, for example, to investigate boxing clubs in urban neighbourhoods (Wacquant, 2004). Ethnographers who use this method become extensively involved in their setting. They undergo the education and training of the members and then join the organisation and participate in the day-to-day activities as full members. For her ethnography on the wealth management industry, Harrington (2016) underwent two years of training and conducted almost six years of research. Other examples of immersion ethnography are Ho’s (2009) study of investment banking and Mears’ (2011) study of models in the fashion industry.

As with life-world analytic ethnography, research based on immersion ethnography necessitates that the researcher becomes an observant participant in the field where they spend several months or years, in order to experience the field as a full member. The two approaches, however, differ in purpose. Immersion ethnography aims to understand the functioning of and participants’ contribution to the field. The life-world analytical ethnographer, by contrast, begins with her/his existential engagement with the field, in order to experience the social

world first-hand. They then aim to reconstruct different types of knowledge and experience, to understand the structure of the life-world of participants in the field.

(2) *Ethnomethodologically-informed ethnography* (Crabtree, 2003) derives from Garfinkel's (2002) proposal for hybrid studies of work. This approach involves a close intertwining of research activities with work practice, and aims to produce 'uniquely adequate' descriptions of work (Garfinkel, 2002). In ethnomethodological research, 'immersion' involves the acquisition of 'vulgar competence' (Garfinkel, 2002), i.e. the ethnographer "must learn and thereby gain an adequate mastery of the day-to-day work of the setting as a condition of their studies" (Crabtree, 2003: 81). The aim of ethnomethodologically-informed ethnography is to use the research to produce descriptions that are verifiable by participants in the field, which can be used to inform organizational change. Although ethnomethodologically-informed ethnography also requires an "existential engagement" of the ethnographer, it differs from life-world analytical ethnography because it is primarily concerned with unpacking the practical organization of activities within a field, rather than with understanding participants' experience of the field.

(3) *Workplace studies* that draw on Garfinkel's (1986) research on work programmes aim to unpack the social organization of work practices and reveal how minute action is critical for the functioning of the field (Luff, Hindmarsh and Heath, 2000). Such studies explore the organization of actions in order to understand, for example, how workers in the control-rooms of rapid transport systems remain aware of events and activities around them and elsewhere in the system (Heath and Luff, 2000). Workplace studies share with focused ethnography the use of video-recordings as principal data and an interest in the practical organization of action. However, focused ethnography differs from workplace studies in its concern with the

participants' experience, knowledge and competencies that underlie the organization of particular activities.

(4) In organization studies and management research we find methods that involve the researcher 'following', 'shadowing' 'trailing' or 'moving with' research subjects (cf. Czarniawska, 2007; McDonald, 2005). Although 'shadowing' also involves the researcher following participants through an organization, it is often used as a scientific research method with the purpose of recording and categorising workers' behaviour (cf. Perlow, 1999). Go-along and other mobile research methods that draw on phenomenology (Kusenbach, 2012; Pink 2007) allow the researcher to develop an "empathetic and sensory embodied (emplaced) understandings of another's experience" (Pink, 2007: 250) and to uncover participants' "subjective stream of experience and practice" (Kusenbach, 2003: 463). At the heart of go-along ethnography, therefore, is the reconstruction of participants' subjective orientation to and experience of space.

## **Discussion**

This article has introduced three phenomenology-based ethnographic research methods: life-world analytical ethnography, focused ethnography and go-along ethnography. These methods share their origin in Alfred Schütz's development of a social phenomenology, itself based on Husserl's phenomenology and Max Weber's sociology of 'Verstehen'. They differ from the ethnographic methods developed in the interactionist tradition (cf. Blumer, 1969), in that their focus is on participants' experience of the social world and on the knowledge and competencies they bring to bear in their actions, rather than on the functioning of a field. In comparison to ethnographies in the interactionist and related traditions, phenomenology-based ethnography radicalises the relationship to the research subjects in three ways: first, it radicalises the

“anthropological estrangement” (Maso, 2001: 137) that characterises traditional ethnography by emphasising the phenomenological bracketing and the suspension of preconceptions and presuppositions; second, it radicalises the “anthropological destrangement” (Maso, 2001: 140), as the ethnographers familiarise themselves with the field through “existential engagement” (Honer and Hitzler, 2015: 6); and third, phenomenology-based ethnography stresses the significance of observant participation and argues that participation in the field is not simply an additional data collection technique augmenting interviews and observations, rather it is crucial for the reconstruction of how participants typically experience the field (Hitzler and Eisewicht, 2016).

Although phenomenology-based ethnographic methods are concerned with revealing participants’ subjective experiences, their aim is to arrive at an understanding of the social structure of knowledge underlying those subjective experiences. The suspension of preconceptions that, in the phenomenological literature, is referred to as ‘bracketing’ or ‘phenomenological reduction’, is important for phenomenology-based ethnography. Indeed, those researchers using life-world analytical ethnography highlight phenomenological reduction as one technique through which they radicalize their relationship to the research subjects in comparison to other kinds of ethnography. They therefore insist on phenomenological reduction as an important basis for their research.

Scholars using focused ethnography and go-along ethnography accept the critique that phenomenological reduction is impossible, because as a method it implies “an exactness and finitude of mathematics” (Dahlberg and Dahlberg, 2004: 272) and ignores that “perception and interpretation are inseparable” (Maso, 2001: 138). Kusenbach (2003) clearly states that she accepts the ethnographer’s positionality and argues that phenomenology-based ethnographers have to be reflexive about their preconceptions and prior assumptions. Scholars who use focused ethnography try to overcome the potential impact of preconceptions on their analysis

by collecting data in pairs and by holding data sessions involving researchers and participants from the field to test interpretations. They argue that continual discussion between two researchers while data are collected and the involvement of participants from the field in data sessions help to identify and lessen the impact of preconceptions on the analysis (Knoblauch, Tuma and Schnettler, 2015).

Thus far this article has discussed life-world analytical ethnography, focused ethnography and go-along ethnography as separate methods. Taking into account their common origin in Schütz's social phenomenology, their close intellectual relationship becomes apparent, despite certain differences explored above. Due to their common phenomenological base, these three methods can complement each other. In fact, Knoblauch (2005) stresses that focused ethnography does not replace life-world analytical ethnography. It is not a rapid, 'quick-and-dirty' research method, rather it demands that researchers acquire detailed knowledge of the field and, ideally, have themselves participated in the activities their research focuses on. Similarly, go-along ethnography can complement and be used in conjunction with both life-world analytic ethnography and focused ethnography. For example, an ethnography of the life-world of highly mobile workers and managers might benefit from go-along ethnography that helps to take into consideration the participants' orientation to the various spaces they navigate and where they work. Furthermore, focused ethnography might be used together with go-along ethnography to inspect specific activities that organizational members engage in while on the move.

The intention behind this article has been to raise the interest of management studies and organizational research scholars in phenomenology-based ethnography. Its purpose has been to encourage management and organisational researchers to further explore the potential of the discussed research methods for their own research. When they consider selecting one of the methods outlined for their investigations, they will have to acquire more in-depth knowledge

and understanding of phenomenology-based ethnography. This article, coupled with the extensive list of references, provides them with a sound basis to begin their pursuit of using the discussed methods in their future investigations.

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